Commercial Services

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COMMERCIAL CATALOGING is centralized cataloging performed and sold by a non-library agency operating for profit. Despite its rapid growth since 1958 commercial cataloging is not a new idea on the American library scene. During the half-century from 1850, when Charles C. Jewett proposed a central bureau for the preservation of stereotype plates and their use in updating library catalogs,[1] to 1901, when the Library of Congress began to sell its catalog cards, there was much interest, discussion, and pressure for centralized and cooperative cataloging. Very early in American librarianship there was recognition of the wasteful duplication of effort among libraries cataloging the same book at the same time. Early proposals toward centralization included the possibility of commercial ventures.

In 1872 in London, Henry Stevens published an idea, which he had circulated by private printing as early as 1868, that there was a need for precise descriptions of all books in libraries and for a "central bibliographical bureau, public or private, where librarians, collectors, and amateurs may buy these authorized descriptive titles of books as they buy postage stamps, money orders and telegrams. . . . Such a bureau, under government protection, it is believed, might . . . be made self-supporting or even remunerative."[2] In the first volume of the *Library Journal,* Melvil Dewey wrote that cooperative cataloging was the greatest need of the profession and that, after agreement on cataloging rules, would come the question: "Who shall prepare the titles of new books as published? The Library of Congress or its copyright department? The publishers themselves? A cataloging bureau, established and maintained by the libraries of the country? An individual or firm, as a commercial venture?"[3]

From its beginnings in 1872 *Publishers' Weekly* had listed titles of

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new books in sufficient detail for some libraries to subscribe to several copies in order to cut out the title descriptions and paste them on catalog cards.[4] In the same magazine there subsequently appeared references to publishers supplying slips that gave descriptions and synopses of their books. C. A. Nelson suggested in a letter to the *Library Journal* that, if the publishers were willing, these slips could be prepared in such a way that they could be pasted on cards.[5] Among those commenting on the plan was R. R. Bowker, who pointed out that publishing was a business, not a philanthropy, and that the approach to publishers should stress the commercial advantages of the idea. He suggested sheets or circulars with three parts: description of title and summary of contents; other books on the same subject or by the same author; and advertising.[6] After study by the Co-operation Committee (founded at the first ALA Conference in 1876) and the Title-Slips Committee (organized in 1877) the project became a reality. In October 1878 the *Title Slip Registry,* printed on one side, was issued as a supplement to the *Library Journal,* free to subscribers with extra copies available at $1 a year.[7] Publishers paid $1 a year per title for this advertising service.[8] At the end of 1879 it had become a monthly *Book Registry* at twenty-five cents an issue[9] and finally, in February 1880, it ceased publication for lack of subscriptions and financial support.[10] After the demise of the *Book Registry* the weekly record of books continued in *Publishers' Weekly* which, in 1887 in cooperation with ALA, issued catalog cards, but not on a sufficiently large scale or with sufficient promptness to give a fair commercial test of possible financial support.[4]

In 1878, *Psyche,* organ of the Cambridge Entomological Club, had issued title slips for books listed in its issues, thus becoming the first to offer such a subscription,[11] and in 1880 had changed its bibliographical record to conform to the *Title Slip Registry.* In addition it printed on catalog cards a bibliography of John LeConte's writings.[8]

Two new commercial plans were proposed in 1893. That of the Rudolph Indexer Company, to issue cards for use with its cabinets, came to naught, but the Library Bureau printed cards for current books until 1897 when ALA assumed the work.[12] This service continued for various types of materials until 1901, when the Library of Congress announced its ability and willingness to sell copies of its cards. This library-based commercial venture brought to reality a half-century of planning for a centralized cataloging agency.

Another pioneeer in the field of library publications, the H. W.

Wilson Company, has long been selling professional services. Cataloging aid was a serendipitous by-product of the many book selection and reference tools initiated by Halsey William Wilson. Originally conceived as a current catalog of new books for the use of booksellers, the *Cumulative Book Index*, founded in 1898, has become an invaluable aid in acquisitions and cataloging. As early as 1899 Wilson decided that each book entry should include the full name of the author, the exact title as found on the title page, and other useful information.

Another source of cataloging information is the *Book Review Digest*, a book selection aid first published in 1905. The Standard Catalog Series provide complete cataloging service. These include the *Fiction Catalog* (1908); *Children's Catalog* (1909); the *Standard Catalog for Public Libraries* (begun in 1918 as subject sections, later combined into one catalog in 1934); the *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries* (1926); and the latest in the series, the *Junior High School Library Catalog* (1966). The *Essay and General Literature Index* (1931) analyzes books of essays in all fields and other composite reference books. As such it has served as a supplement to card catalogs in many libraries and spared them the time and expense of analytics. The *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* (1901) and the other specialized periodical indexes that followed it have long provided not only an index to magazine articles but also a guide to subject headings, especially in new subject fields.[13]

The Wilson Printed Catalog Card Service was begun in 1938. In 1965 approximately 33,000 libraries purchased over 11,000,000 sets of cards, or almost 57,000,000 cards.[14] In fiscal 1965 the Library of Congress sold 61.5 million cards to 17,000 subscribers; more than 4,000 publishers now list LC card numbers in their books.[15] Continuing its history of cataloging service, *Publishers' Weekly* is again cooperating by providing Library of Congress with review copies of books for cataloging and supplying LC card information in its "Weekly Record" of books. This record is cumulated monthly and annually as the *American Book Publishers Record.*

Of the many other reference books of value to the cataloger only a few can be cited here. Included among these are *3000 Books for Secondary School Libraries, Basic Book Collection for Elementary Grades, Basic Book Collection for Junior High Schools, Basic Book Collection for High Schools* and the *Booklist.* Several national bibliographies are of considerable cataloging worth, notably the *British*

National Bibliography which gives complete catalog information and also sells cards, and the Scandinavian bibliographies which provide entry and classification but no subject headings.

This survey shows that commercial cataloging had many ancestors in the last century and that some form of commercial cataloging has been available for many years. However, its modern development and rapid increase began in 1958. From a dozen firms in 1964 the industry in the United States and Canada has expanded today to about thirty companies advertising some form of cataloging and/or processing. Many factors have contributed to this remarkable growth: a tremendous increase in book production; more library funds provided by state and Federal legislation; expanded book budgets to match the population explosion; new branch libraries and elementary and secondary schools. Concurrent with this was a critical shortage of librarians, especially catalogers, to service and process the additional books. The acquisitions by libraries generated by these conditions exceeded their capacity to organize these materials for immediate use. Smaller school, college, and public libraries were especially caught in the processing squeeze and desperate administrators contracted for services with outside agencies, among them book wholesalers. Seeing a need for professional services and the prospect of expansion, profit, and fine public relations, the companies offered technical services at specified prices. The response was immediate. One publisher stated in 1961 that he had to sell cards in order to sell books. The library profession has nurtured an industry, estimated by this writer in 1964 to be worth five million dollars, which now conservatively stated must exceed twenty million dollars annually.

The card services of the Library of Congress and the H. W. Wilson Company are the foundation of commercial cataloging since these are used for all titles for which they are available. Commercial cataloging and processing services range all the way from free catalog cards and processing kits to the installation of a complete library. Between these two extremes can be found a varied bill of fare. Many publishers and jobbers participate in the "Cards with Books" program whereby a set of Library of Congress cards is sent with each book. A firm which offers a complimentary kit upon request also sends with its books a free cataloging information slip from which a library can produce its own cards if it so desires. It must be assumed that the cost of this "free" service is included in the price of the book.

All of the services offer both standard and custom cataloging.

Standard cataloging is cataloging according to a prescribed formula established individually by the firms and is usually offered for a list of books selected from approved sources. It normally consists of a set of LC or Wilson cards or, if these are not available, of annotated cards produced by the company itself, one feature of which is the omission of place of publication in the imprint. Classification and subject cataloging are based on the latest editions of the abridged *Dewey Classification* and *Sears List of Subject Headings,* with a Cutter device most often consisting of the initial of the author's surname. Standard processing provides the book with an imprinted book pocket, book card and spine label, and a plastic jacket. Minor variations from this pattern are sometimes allowed for fiction and biography at no extra charge, but other differences entail an additional fee. LC classification and subject headings and unabridged Dewey Classification may also be ordered.

Major variations from the firm's standard form require custom cataloging, and this is tailored to the library's exact specifications. Some libraries submit their own classification and/or subject headings at the time they place an order, thus insuring a desired consistency in their catalogs. Several companies limit their cataloging services to custom work for college, university, technical and research libraries.

Also on the market are processing kits consisting of eight cards (five with headings and three without), a pocket, book card and peel-proof spine label each imprinted with the necessary information, but excluding a plastic cover. These were introduced in 1965 and quickly adopted by most firms. As stated by the originator they were meant to aid those libraries for which Wilson and LC cards respectively were too little or too much.[16] With so many libraries converting from Dewey to LC classification, a reclassification kit is also available so that libraries can make the necessary changes with a minimum of effort.

The commercial services usually provide either a limited number of cross references for name and subject entries or none at all. One firm did offer to sell the *Sears List of Subject Headings* (eighth edition) on cards at one price for the set. In following the cataloging as provided on LC or Wilson cards the firms also fall into the inconsistencies in entry, classification, and subject headings which result from changes of rules or from new editions. Each library must therefore provide such references as are needed, from old to new forms,

in order to avoid chaos in its catalogs. Thus it is false to assume that all catalog work and local costs are eliminated with the purchase of a service.

Other technical services offered include computer-produced catalog cards, book catalogs printed by computer or by photographic reproduction of cards, serial subscription controls, automation and system design, book and periodical binding, library planning, modernization, and consultant services.

Reproduction of a library's own prepared copy or catalog cards is available from both large national firms and small home-based operations. At the other extreme is the installation of complete libraries fully equipped with a basic collection of cataloged and processed books, shelving, charging system and furniture. This indicates the wide range of services available—from aid for do-it-yourself cataloging/processing to "instant libraries." [17]

In using these services a library must remember that it is not purchasing book selection, and availability of processing should not influence this library activity. This is still a local professional responsibility to be exercised in the light of the needs and interests of patrons and community. Some jobbers offer processing for any book from any publisher, while others offer only their own publications or those of a limited number of publishers. Vendors' catalogs often carry Dewey number, age and grade classification, and NDEA and other recommendation labels, and some catalogs are based on standard library lists of recommended books.

The costs of these services have an equally wide range—from free cards and processing kits to the incalculable amounts needed to finance an automated system. The charge for standard cataloging is from 60 cents to $1.90 per volume. Within this price may be allowed such variations as special classification for fiction and biography and placement of pocket, while an ownership stamp, full Cutter number, accession stamp, or red subject headings would carry extra price tags varying from 3 to 45 cents each. Prices for custom cataloging depend wholly upon the specifications requested by the individual library. Original cataloging for a book in the English language may cost from $2 to $3 and one in a foreign language from $3 to $4, plus an additional fee for processing. The price of a processing kit is set at 29 cents by the firm which originated the service, but others offer the same or a similar kit with or without plastic jacket in a price range of 15 to 80 cents. If the pocket and spine label are applied to the

book by the firm, the processing cost plus the cards is 60 to 95 cents. Book catalogs involve so many different procedures and library requirements that there can be no generalizing on prices. They are considerably more costly than card catalogs and can hardly be considered by a single library but only by library systems with a number of outlets.[17]

Services can be purchased in several ways—by single order, by price per volume for custom cataloging, by yearly bid, or by contractual agreement. On the basis of single order or individual price it is possible to buy as many or as few titles as desired. Yearly bids, on the other hand, can involve problems for a library or school district. Bids can vary from year to year and this could mean changes of vendors and hence of cataloging practices. Even worse, an inexperienced and even unqualified firm could underbid and then prove unable to deliver a usable product. A contract with carefully written specifications that can be negotiated will produce the best results.[18]

While many libraries have contracted for cataloging on a long-term basis, others have found the services particularly useful for such short-term projects as the cataloging of basic collections for new branch, school and college libraries. For a library using commercial processing help there may be savings in staff time, space, equipment, and supplies, and a simplification of business records, but wise selection of a service takes several criteria into account. There must be evaluation of services based on comparison of costs, quality, coverage, and speed. Information on prices can be obtained by submitting specifications to various companies for estimates, or by comparing the costs and services offered by the various standard plans. Definition of terms and precision of facts are important. Cataloging may consist merely of a set of LC or Wilson cards and processing may only be the application of another firm's processing kit. Competition is keen and advertising can be misleading. Quality involves among other things the type of cataloging and classification and its adequacy for local needs. Can a firm supply all titles or is its coverage limited to certain titles or categories of books or to certain publishers? If several jobbers must be patronized to obtain full coverage, their cataloging practices may vary.

Speed of delivery is important but it should be assessed relative to the library's own performance in terms of time between its ordering of a book and its placement of the book on the shelf ready for lend-

ing. Delay in delivery is the main complaint against commercial cataloging and the main reason for cancellation by some libraries. One firm advertises 120 to 150 days for completion of an order. Several factors affect speed. Some firms appear to have over-extended themselves by accepting more orders than they can fulfill or by attempting too much custom cataloging. A total of 40,000 volumes annually is considered the minimum for a successful centralized operation, but perhaps there is also a maximum beyond which speed and efficiency cannot be maintained. It is reasonable to assume that such a limit exists for custom work. A librarian's demand for custom processing or cataloging may be the fundamental reason for delay in the arrival of his books. The need to perform original cataloging for many juvenile and young adult titles is likely to cause a backlog for a commercial service just as it does in any catalog department. Each customer should realize that the problems arising in his own catalog department are multiplied in the larger operations of the commercial cataloger; they do not disappear just because he personally no longer encounters them. Prompt service may be affected by the jobber's difficulty in obtaining books from publishers. A title may be out of stock or out of print. The dealer himself may not maintain an adequate inventory or he may underestimate the popularity of a book. Libraries report frequent difficulty as to receipt of association and foreign publications and other special items.

What has been consumer reaction generally? This is difficult to ascertain but a few individual cases can be cited. One university starting off with a collection of fifty thousand volumes found commercial cataloging of great assistance in getting the library established. Although it must now allow three months for delivery of books, it still finds the quality of the work satisfactory. A junior college waited eight to ten weeks for its first books and five to six months for many others, but it is still satisfied and could not do without commercial service. Such lack of speed, however, was the reason for a state library agency's cancellation of an otherwise satisfactory service; for the state's small libraries, it was essential that new books be on the shelves quickly. One state college was displeased with the cataloging given a collection of five hundred children's books to be used in a course in children's literature. Ordered in July, the first books did not arrive until November. Class numbers had been omitted on some of the cards, pockets were missing, and despite the firm's claim to have an authority file there were inconsistencies in

form of entry for the same author, and in classification numbers for books on a given subject.[19] An eastern college conducted a pilot study of three orders, a small lot sent directly to publishers and the other groups to two different commercial services. Delay and cancellations were the big factors with regard to the latter orders. On one of them 81 percent of the order was filled after 175 days, but on the other only 67 percent had arrived after 163 days. Of 949 volumes ordered in the latter case 313 were cancelled, half by the firm because of out-of-stock or out-of-print reports and the remainder by the library. Costs of first volume/first copy cataloging/processing were $1.95 and $2.10. By comparison, the publishers had been more prompt on deliveries, and local cataloging costs had averaged 40 cents higher.[20]

Local catalogers checking a commercial delivery must be alert for errors, such as incorrect call numbers on spine labels, editions confused with imprints, and incorrect LC cards.[19] Comments received by this writer reveal satisfaction and dissatisfaction with commercial services to be about evenly divided among libraries employing them.

Most commercial processors have automated their own ordering and invoicing procedures as well as those of their customers. They have or should have facilities for the warehousing and handling of large quantities of books. Depending on size they operate a manual or automated assembly line. When an order for standard cataloging is received, the books are matched with cards and transported via conveyor to stations for pocketing, labeling, jacketing, packing with invoice, and shipping. If a library requests any variations in processing, the books must detour to another station or line for individual handling. This disruption of flow of materials reduces speed and efficiency; resulting increases in costs are passed on to the library. Commercial catalogers have found custom cataloging to be an annoyance and a great expense and feel that it should and could be eliminated. Some librarians, on the other hand, are delighted to be able to order exact specifications and thus eliminate special operations for themselves. While many librarians adhere to unnecessary preferences or traditions, commercial agencies may not recognize and appreciate the necessity for certain cataloging details. This is why it is so important that supervisors in the commercial firms be catalogers both with experience in technical services and also possessed of imagination and administrative skill in order to clarify differences between customer demand and dealer capability. The catalogers should be active participants in ALA activities and discuss

mutual problems with their colleagues in large library catalog departments. Most of the firms have expressed a desire for a standard for cataloging that all can accept and their willingness to cooperate with an ALA committee on this matter. Librarians should also be willing to compromise or forego individual preferences since this might reduce the price tag on a commercially prepared book. Perhaps the twain shall meet. Although many problems are involved it seems logical that a basic plan could be devised that would represent both standard cataloging and a cataloging standard. One company has decided that it can no longer afford any degree of custom service and will offer only one standard from which there can be no deviations.

At present commercial firms definitely fill a need and librarians have fostered the industry. Both sides benefit and both have a responsibility to uphold professional standards. Neither profits by allowing sub-standard work or by the presence of unqualified companies in this highly competitive arena. The scent of high financial return may lure into the field inexperienced and incompetent businessmen. Young men with no library or publishing experience have inquired at ALA headquarters seeking information about cataloging in order to set up commercial cataloging firms. Many customers are likewise inexperienced in cataloging matters—trustees and school superintendents who contract for these services but who do not always understand the subtleties and implications of cataloging.

What of the future? Many predictable as well as unforeseeable changes are ahead in the next few years. There will be an expansion of the types of services offered. Commercial firms now provide management and consultant services and management companies are entering the field offering to conduct library surveys. Experimentation with the cataloging of audio-visual materials is also under way. Over a year ago a New York record firm proposed a cataloging service for phonograph records providing LC or similar cards and processed recordings ready to shelve. However, it has not been able to elicit sufficient interest from potential customers to warrant the substantial investment involved.

Automation will bring many changes in card and book catalogs and the MARC project at the Library of Congress has implications for the commercial field also. The main problems with book catalogs at present are their high cost and lack of currency, but improvements of procedures and advances in technology will change the picture.

There is the possibility that firms could specialize in either book or card catalogs. Another practical idea would be for each firm to concentrate on one standard cataloging/processing plan so that it could more efficiently organize its operations, enabling each library to select the firm offering the degree of custom work desired. In the future, on-line computer systems may completely change the character of both library and commercial cataloging operations. Information retrieval may be available from data banks with companies specializing in different subject areas such as technology, social sciences, and so on.

The commercial services will be affected by the new *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*. They will no doubt follow the lead of the Library of Congress in adopting the new code and query their customers as to their preferences. Less original cataloging may be performed by the commercial catalogers as LC provides more foreign-language cataloging under Title II C of the Higher Education Act, and also in the event that LC and Wilson increase their coverage of American books in the juvenile and young adult field. It is to be hoped that the consequent saving will be passed on to the customers.

Competition will increase. On the basis of recent growth it is predictable that more firms will enter the field. The commercial firms have discovered that cataloging is expensive and its profits uncertain. The costs involved in maintaining large catalog departments are high and jobbers will need ample financial resources or they will find it increasingly difficult to remain competitive. They may be forced to quit or to seek mergers. The big companies will probably get bigger and the small jobbers disappear. This trend is already evident. Large corporations, with or without connections with the book world, are seeking book-oriented outlets. This is leading to communication dynasties embracing both the spoken and the written word.

Since the aim of this review has been to present a general survey of the industry, no firms or services have been specifically identified. A directory of commercial catalogers is available.[21]

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